

OBITUARY : BENOYTOSH BHATTACHARYYA

Dr. Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, generally known as Bhattacharyya of Baroda, died on 22 June 1964 at his residence near Calcutta.

Born on 6 January 1897 in a family devoted to Sanskrit learning, Bhattacharyya had his first lessons in Sanskrit with his father Mahamahopadhyaya Haraprasad Shastri—a great scholar in different branches of Sanskrit literature and an antiquarian. In 1919 he took a first class M. A. in Sanskrit from Calcutta University and in 1925 Ph. D., the first such, from Dacca University. While his father had guided him through the different branches of Sanskrit literature, young Bhattacharyya had in Professor Alfred Foucher his preceptor in matters relating to ancient art forms and archaeology of India. He spent some years studying Sanskrit manuscripts in Nepal. While just thirty he made his mark as a scholar of Tantra and Pratima.

In 1924 Maharaja Sayaji Rao Gaekwad, a great patron of learning and scholarship, took Bhattacharyya to Baroda to be the General Editor of Gaekwad's Oriental Series and after three years made him the Director of Oriental Institute, Baroda. As the General Editor of the Oriental Series and the Director of the Oriental Institute, Bhattacharyya showed extraordinary organizing abilities as well as erudition. Part of his time was devoted to lectures to degree students. The Gaekwad recognized his merits by conferring on him the titles of Rajya Ratna and Jnana Jyoti. He retired in 1952.

Among his publications are : *The Indian Buddhist Iconography* (Oxford 1924 ; revised edition Calcutta 1958) ; *Sadhanamala* (Vol. I Baroda 1925 and Vol. II Baroda 1928) ; *Two Vajrayana Works* (Baroda 1929) ; *Guhyasamaja Tantra* (Baroda 1931) ; *An Introduction to Buddhist Esoterism* (Oxford 1932) ; and *Nispannayogavali* (Baroda 1949).

In his study of the Tantras Bhattacharyya began with no particular sympathy for the mystic practices and rituals as is evident from his earlier writings. With the progress of his studies in Brahmanical, Jain and Buddhist sources he came to an acceptance of the higher values of the Tantras. While he was among the first to assert that the Hindu Tantra borrowed much from the Vajrayana and even debased many Vajrayana practices, Bhattacharyya very firmly held that later Mahayana pantheon deliberately and consciously incorporated a number of Hindu

deities. From medieval Hindu tradition he identified the Mahayana deity Prajna with the Hindu deity Sakti. He was as firm on this as about the nomenclature Dhyani Buddha being ancient and correct.

The symposium on Tantras opened in this number of the *Bulletin* will no doubt be poorer because Bhattacharyya can no longer join issue. He had also advised us to organize in our pages a probe into the nomenclature Dhyani Buddha. Namgyal Institute of Tibetology benefited much from his advice regarding identification of images and figures on scrolls. The publication RGYAN-DRUG MCHOG-GNYIS had his guidance as our next publication on iconography was to have the same.

In retirement, that is since 1952 Bhattacharyya spent his time on finding remedies and systematic cure for physical and mental ailments in the Tantric lore. A large number of difficult cases were cured. Bhattacharyya claimed to have freely used Hindu and Buddhist, Indian and Tibetan, formulae and spells. He published some books on teletherapy: *The Science of Tridosha* (New York 1951), *Gem Therapy* (Calcutta 1958 ; 1963), and *Magnet Dowsing* (Calcutta 1960). For strictly academic class he wrote a paper entitled "Scientific Background of the Buddhist Tantras" in Buddha Jayanti Special Number of the *Indian Historical Quarterly* (Calcutta 1956).

As an academician of highest discipline and as an authority on Indian esoteric systems and iconography Bhattacharyya was held in esteem in connected circles all over the world. Those who came into intimate contact with him found him more a Bodhisattva than a Pandita.

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